**INTERCESSION: PRAYER IN A TIME OF CRISIS BY REV. G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**3. FOR THE CHURCH; THAT SHE MAY COME TO A FULLER REALISATION OF HER UNITY IN THE SPIRIT by REV. G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

*"And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to thee. Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are ... Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me."*

*John 17:11, 20-23*

*"I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all."*

*Ephesians 4:1-6*

The first thing I want to say in order to lead to our united intercession will take the form of two questions, arising out of the passages we read. First, did the prayer of Jesus mean anything? Secondly and principally, Was the prayer of Jesus answered? As to the first, I will not tarry, for we are all agreed that it meant something, much, everything. As to the second, I ask it so as the more rapidly to arrest attention and fix it upon the one thought which is in my mind, and which I would fain pass on to you with all earnestness. I ask the question because sometimes I think, overwhelmed as we are by the sense of the sad divisions which exist among Christian people, we are inclined to imagine that this prayer of Jesus was not answered.

Let me start, then, with this affirmation. The prayer of Jesus was certainly answered; the prayer of Jesus is being continuously answered; the prayer of will ultimately be perfectly answered. These sentences are chosen with care because in the words I have read to you we have what I think I may venture to describe as a threefold prayer.

First, He prayed quite literally about these men who were round about Him, prayed for those twelve, whom God had so specially given Him for co-operation with Him in His ministry, and for the commencement of that larger ministry in the power of the Spirit, to which He Himself is pledged until he shall deliver the Kingdom to His Father. Then, proceeding with His prayer, after a little He said, "Neither for these only do I pray, but for them also that believe on Me through their word." If there is one phrase in that wonderful prayer that always fills the heart with gladness it is that phrase.

We see Him, under the shadow of the Cross, looking down through all the coming ages and including in His asking, all Christian souls. We are among the number of those who have believed on Him through the apostolic word. He prayed finally that all might be perfected into one, and the very phrase suggests a process leading to a consummation.

I affirm once again that our Lord's prayer was answered. It was answered first in the matter of the men who were round about Him. They were made one, in Him. It is being answered in the case of all those who believe in Him through their word, they are being made one in Him. It will be answered finally, as all shall be perfected into that last and glorious unity through which the world shall know. Jesus prayed. He meant something by His praying. His prayer was answered. It prevailed with God.

In the light of these facts we ask, What are we to do with our divisions, the things to which we have made reference, that sadden our hearts. In proportion as we are living in true fellowship with the Lord we are all saddened by some aspects of these divisions. The shame of them is upon us whenever we face the world. The sorrow of them is with us whenever we really get near to each other. The sin of them is a burden upon our souls when we are alone with the Lord.

Wherein do we fail, if it be true that the Lord's prayer has been answered, is being answered, and must ultimately be answered?

I turn to the apostolic word, and shall take one or two minutes in exposition of that word quite simply, quite naturally, asking you to observe what Paul laid as a sacred charge upon these people to whom he wrote. He charged them that they should "keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." I have omitted for a moment the introductory words, "With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love"; I omit for a moment the final declaration, in which he described the unity which is to be kept, "one body, one spirit, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all"; and I fasten attention upon the central charge "giving diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

What then is this charge? What are we to do? Let us give special attention to the word keep. I am not prepared to say that the word is wrong; I am prepared to say that it is unfortunate, in view of the use we often make of the word. The actual Greek word in the New Testament is not one of two other words also translated "keep" in our English versions. It is not the word phulasso which means to prevent escaping; it has no relation to the word koustodia which suggests guarding as with a military garrison. It is the word tereo, which simply means to keep in view. I hope no one will think that I am laying undue emphasis upon a word. The matter is really important. Paul was not charging these early Christians - and the Holy Spirit through the sacred writing does not charge in us - the duty of thinking of the unity of the Spirit as something which is to be prevented from escaping, as though we were policemen watching over it; nor as something we are to guard as with a garrison, and fight in order to defend. He speaks of the unity of the Spirit as something which exists, and which cannot be destroyed; but which we are to keep in view.

If I were translating this passage for today - and I say for today because words change - I should render it, "Observe the unity of the Spirit." I would use the word observe because it has a twofold meaning in our common use of it. To observe is to see; to observe is also to obey. I observe a rule. The first meaning is that I know it, I see it; but the second and profounder meaning is, that I yield myself to it. Endeavouring to observe the unity of the Spirit. Not to fight for it, not to create it, but to observe it.

I speak again out of profound conviction when I say that if today the Church of God could see the real meaning of that, and fall in line with it, the difference it would make would be profound. There is no need for reunion, because union has never ceased; and unity has never been destroyed. The apostle did not charge these early Christians to keep the uniformity of the Spirit. Uniformity is of the body, and the body is a method of expression. I go further; the apostle did not charge them to observe the unanimity of the Spirit. Unanimity is of the mind, and the mind is the organ of opinion. Unity is of the spirit, which is essential, the deep and underlying life. Our Lord's prayer was answered; the Church is one.

*"We are not divided, all one body we."*

Wherein then are we wrong? Not in the different forms of bodily expression. I challenge you, that you cannot hold a brief for any ecclesiastical form or fashion, basing your defence upon the New Testament. Neither can we hold a brief for any formulated creed, basing our argument upon the New Testament, for there is no formulated creed in the New Testament.

That brings us back to the central matter, that of our unity in Christ. The spacious and glorious vision created by the brief words of the apostle should never be forgotten, "One body, and one spirit... for one vocation - one hope of your calling." One body, Christ and all His. One Spirit, the Spirit of God by Whom Christ as to human life was conceived and begotten, in whose power He wrought and lived, and through Whom, the eternal Spirit He offered Himself to God, and by Whose power He was raised from the dead. The one Spirit through Whom we are begotten into relationship with Him, are sustained in all our pilgrim pathway, are enabled to do our Christian service. One vocation, that of setting forth the praises of Him Who hath called us out of darkness into His marvellous light, revealing to men the meaning of His Kingship, and bringing men into right relationship therewith. That there may be no mistake concerning this unity, the apostle proceeded, One Lord, Jesus Himself; One faith, the faith that fastens upon Him and rests in Him; one baptism, the baptism of the Spirit whereby we are made members of the one Lord. Then he climbed to the ultimate vision, and declared: "One God and Father of all, Who is over all, and through all and in all." Whether believers in Christ be in the Roman Church, the Greek Church, the Episcopal Church, the Free Church of any form or fashion, or outside all organised Church life, then by relationship to these great verities the unity is unbroken.

In proportion as we see this, we shall observe it, with all lowliness and meekness, with all longsuffering, forbearing one another in love. The apostle knew how difficult it would be for some men to understand the man who needs a high ritual to worship; he knew how difficult it would be for other men to understand how another can worship in a simple service, where a man prays without the help of the prayer book. Forbearing one another in love!

The passion grows upon me with the passing of the years, for a recognition of this underlying unity; that we may be done with the things that divide; that we may understand each other; that we may cease judgments of each other that are based upon our own narrow outlook; that we may come to respect men from whom we profoundly differ in forms of worship and expressions of faith; that we may keep in in view the unity of the Spirit that binds us together in Jesus Christ.

Therefore I have worded our line of intercession thus: For the Church, that she may come to a fuller realization of her unity in the Spirit.